



# Life On and Off the Hard Shoulder

Older Gypsies Living on the  
Roadside and in Housing

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## Executive summary

This study looked at the lives of older Gypsies — we wanted the voices of older Gypsy people to be heard, as they are often neglected in reports that cover the needs of older people in general.

This is the first study to have been conducted that identified any differences between the lives and experiences of older Gypsies living on the roadside and those living in housing.

Gypsy researchers interviewed ten older Gypsies aged between 60 and 90 years old (five of the older people are living on the roadside and five of the older people are living in housing).

We hope that this report will help to increase the understanding of the lives of older Gypsies and make service providers more aware of the differing health and social care needs of older Gypsy people.

### What did we learn from the older nomadic Gypsies?

All of the nomadic older Gypsies highlighted the value and pleasures of a life on the road. Many of the older people talked of the joy of travelling with their family and the choice they have to travel alone or with friends. Unlike people in housing, this means that if older people want a change, then they are free to both change location and their travel companions.

#### Accommodation issues

- Our study found that due to a lack of official trailer (caravan) sites or temporary stopping places, the older nomadic Gypsies were forced into stopping on unsafe and unsuitable locations.

- All of the older people we interviewed who were living on the roadside experienced constant evictions and this created anxiety. Shockingly, we found that two of the elders (and their families) had even been evicted from rubbish dumps/recycling centres.
- The older people living on the roadside did not have access to clean running water — (despite this being a breach of their human rights). However, they identified the strategies that they used to access clean water.
- One of the older people explained how planning laws restrain her family contact — because if any more members of her family moved to be nearer to her, then everyone would risk getting evicted.

#### Health access

- All of the nomadic older people managed to access health services (although two of the older people stated that they drove a long way to visit a GP who they knew and trusted). Others utilised a local NHS walk in service — although this precludes them from health screening and does not promote continuity of care.
- Because most of the nomadic older people were not literate and they did not have a permanent address, most of them had arranged for hospital letters to be delivered to the address of a family member, friend or the local Gypsy support group. These contacts would read the letter out to the older person and take them to any appointments, if there was a need for assistance.
- Two of the older people expressed concern about the use of modern technology and

the fact they could not read and did not know how to use a computer — and this has implications for health access as it can exclude people from booking appointments as well as finding health promotion information.

### Discrimination

- We did not plan to ask the older people about their experiences of discrimination, but it was notable that the shadow of discrimination was threaded throughout their narratives. Listening to the older people, it seemed that it was those living on the roadside who are experiencing the most blatant discrimination and they described some of the avoidance techniques they use to keep away from racist attacks and/or racial abuse.

### What did we learn from the older Gypsies living in housing?

- The older people we interviewed had either moved into housing due to poor quality facilities when living on the road and/or they moved into housing due to health issues and/or ageing.

- Listening to the older people living in housing, it seems that they really valued the amenities (such as running water and heating) and the security that living in a building could offer.
- Most of the older people highlighted that they had family and friends nearby, but they also missed their traditional, cultural life on the road, that had offered them freedom, friendship and community.
- In many ways, older Gypsies living in accommodation faced similar issues to other older people living in housing.

### Commonalities between older Gypsies on the road and in housing

- All the people that we interviewed highlighted the importance of family and the value of the help and support they received from their family. However, in spite of this, a few of the older people suggested that they still got lonely sometimes.
- All of the older people had access to a mobile phone and clearly this was valuable for staying in touch with loved ones as well as asking for help if needed.
- The majority of the older people we interviewed were not literate.





# 1 Gypsies in the UK

Romany Gypsies were first recorded in Scotland in 1505 and recent linguistic and genetic evidence has confirmed that Romany Gypsies originated from India.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the word 'Gypsy' originated from the mistaken belief that they came from Egypt, or the Middle East and therefore families were often referred to as 'Egyptians' — later to become known as Gypsies and today community members continue to use the word Gypsy (spelt with a capital 'G'), to describe their ethnic identity.<sup>2</sup> However, while people from outside of the community have written much about them, Gypsy people themselves have tended to use oral history

rather than written records. To share their history, culture and values and oral traditions still remains important in most Gypsy families today — especially among older Gypsy people who are often not literate.

Today there is an estimated population of from 150,000 to 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers living across the UK.<sup>3</sup> As ethnic groups, they experience widespread disadvantage and discrimination across all aspects of their lives<sup>4</sup> and they are amongst the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in British society<sup>5</sup> with some European reports also identifying them as being among some of the most socially excluded ethnic groups in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Given these





inequalities it is not surprising to know that research suggests that Gypsies and Travellers often have poorer general health and higher rates of limiting long-term illness than the general population.<sup>7</sup>

It is impossible to understand the lives of older Gypsies without an understanding of the context of their lives and the impact of land/planning laws. For centuries, nomadic Gypsies and Travellers have been allowed to use 'common land' as lawful stopping places but land and planning laws by successive governments have removed their access to traditional stopping places. Consequently, the biggest challenge that nomadic Gypsies face, is a lack of access to trailer (caravan) sites and stopping places. In the most recent changes (2015), the Government altered the definition of who could be considered to be a Gypsy or Traveller for planning purposes. Consequently, those who have stopped travelling because of ill health and/or old age, are no longer classified as Gypsies or Travellers under planning law.<sup>8</sup> This means that many older Gypsies (and Travellers) and their families, will no longer be able to seek

planning permission to meet their accommodation needs, if they have been unable to keep travelling during the previous year. Consequently, because there are very few legal places to stop, many nomadic people are forced to either resort to unauthorised encampments or pulling up on the roadside, or other unsuitable places.<sup>9</sup> However, Gypsies and Travellers are legally recognised as ethnic groups<sup>10</sup> and technically they have 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act (2010). Moreover, the Public Sector Equality Duty also requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities and this includes nomadic and settled Gypsies. However, in spite of equality legislation, Gypsy, (Traveller and Roma) people frequently experience discrimination and hate crime<sup>11</sup> and a number of authors have suggested that discrimination against Gypsy Traveller and Roma communities remains the last bastion of 'acceptable' racism in Britain.<sup>12</sup> This study was undertaken within the English Gypsy community.



## 2 What is known about older Gypsies?

Very little research has been conducted on the lives and experiences of older Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. However, we know that:-

- According to the last national census, only 6% of Gypsies and Irish Travellers in the UK are aged 65 years and above. This contrasts with the general population, where the number of people aged 65 and above are 18.2% of the UK population<sup>13</sup>
- Older Gypsies play an important role in family and community life<sup>14</sup> and they are often given a high status within the community and may be responsible for negotiating or taking community decisions.<sup>15</sup>
- Older Gypsies may not have a state pension and may be reliant on pension credit and therefore, family support becomes very important in old age.<sup>16</sup>
- Older Gypsies or Irish Travellers are more likely to have no or fewer qualifications than younger community members.<sup>17</sup>
- Although most Gypsies and Travellers now live in housing, contrary to expectations research suggests that the likelihood of living in a trailer (caravan), generally increases with age.<sup>18</sup>
- Data from the National Census indicates that Gypsies and Traveller people are among the highest providers of unpaid care (in terms of hours of care provided),<sup>19</sup> yet research suggests that many public sector services for carers<sup>20</sup> are not culturally appropriate for many Gypsies and Travellers.
- There are low levels of literacy found across the community,<sup>21</sup> this combined with a lack of access to digital resources will limit carer's ability to access financial and/or physical support.<sup>22</sup>



### 3 Why do we need a study about older Gypsies?

Our study started when community outreach workers from the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group became increasingly aware that many of the older Gypsies in their communities were facing specific challenges in their lives.

#### Aims of the study

- To identify any differences between the lives and experiences of older Gypsies living on the roadside and those living in housing.
- To increase awareness of the differing health and social care needs of older Gypsy people living in housing and on the roadside.

#### Objectives

- To allow the voices of older Gypsy people to be heard and to learn from their experiences.
- To enable services providers to recognise the differing support needs of older Gypsies living in housing and on the roadside.
- To enable local authorities, health and environmental agencies to utilise the learning from this report to integrate the needs of older Gypsies into local planning (such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment), to ensure that the needs of older Gypsies are recognised and met.

We are grateful for the funding provided by the Positive Ageing Research Institute at Anglia Ruskin University to conduct this research.<sup>23</sup> Although this is a preliminary study on the lives of older Gypsies — we are hoping to develop a larger national study at a later date.

#### Limitations of the study

We recognise that this study has some limitations due to the fact that we only interviewed a small number of older people (10n), within a defined geographical area (the East Midlands). In writing this report, we were aware that we risked portraying all older Gypsy people as the same. However, while this report highlights some of the commonalities, among older Gypsies (especially those who experience similar living conditions), we also acknowledge that everyone is unique, and everyone has their own life experiences, capacities and vulnerabilities.





## 4 Research methods

Four researchers have been involved in developing this study, three from the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group (DGLG) and one from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU). The researchers have a long history of working together to promote the rights and understanding of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities living in the UK. We felt it would be most appropriate for the Gypsy researchers to collect the data from their own community, using semi-structured interviews and talking to older people in their own trailers (caravans) and homes. The researchers co-developed the study and technically it may be considered as participatory action research — and this is the way we have worked together over the years.

**The themes of the study:** While the Gypsy community workers/researchers were aware of some of the issues that the older Gypsies were facing, they wanted to examine these in more detail. One of the younger researchers was also interested in finding out what older people enjoyed in life and what objects they liked (and some of the answers were surprising).

**Ethic approval:** The study was funded by Anglia Ruskin University and we were successful in our application to the University Ethics Committee for approval to conduct the study.

**Inclusion criteria:** The criteria for inclusion in the study were, that the potential participant was self-defined as a Gypsy, aged 60-years-old or above, and either living on the roadside, or living in housing and able and willing to take part in the study.

**Recruiting participants:** Rather than the research team approaching the older people directly, we asked a Gypsy community worker, attached to the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

(NFGLG) to kindly contact a number of older Gypsies by mobile phone on our behalf. We used this approach to enable the older people to make a choice to participate or not. Once the older people had been invited to take part in the study, they were given two weeks to reply (by mobile phone) to the NFGLG office if they wanted to take part in the study. Ten older Gypsies kindly agreed to participate in the study (four women and one man were living in housing and four men and one woman were living on the roadside). Once the older people had agreed to be interviewed, the researchers from the DGLG contacted the older people by mobile phone and arranged a date to interview them in their trailer or home.

**Informed consent:** Informed consent is an ethical requirement for all research, and this is usually obtained in writing. However, as many of the older people are not literate, the University Ethics Committee agreed that we could ask for verbal consent to take part in the study. It is well recognised that oral consent can be a substitute for written consent where people are unable to sign a document.<sup>24</sup>

**The interviews:** These were conducted at a time that was convenient for the older person and the researchers made it clear that the interview could be stopped at any time and that the participants also had the right to withdraw from the study. On meeting the older people, the researchers told them about the study again and they were assured that their real names would not be used. Then they were asked if they would give their informed consent (verbally). All of the older people gave their permission to a) participate in the study, b) to allow the researcher to record the interview and use the data and c) to allow the researcher to

take photographs of objects that they liked. The data was collected in the East Midlands region by the Gypsy researchers over a three-month period (during the summer of 2018).

**The data:** The Gypsy researchers transcribed (verbatim) the recorded interviews and during the transcription process all of the participants' names and location details were removed, in order to protect the identity of the older people. All data was stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).<sup>25</sup>

**Data coding and analysis:** In common with other studies,<sup>26</sup> we decided that two members of the research team would code the data separately (one Gypsy researcher from the DGLG and the researcher from the Positive Ageing Institute at ARU). Firstly, we identified the emerging codes within each interview and then we looked across the interviews within each group (i.e. the group that were roadside and the group in housing). Finally, we analysed the emerging themes from both of the groups and the resulting findings are represented in this report. The quotations that have been used in the report typify the responses from the older people and where there are dissenting voices, we have included these as quotes.





## 5 About the older people we interviewed

We interviewed ten older people; five of them were living roadside and five were living in housing (flats, sheltered housing). The following section offers a brief outline about their living situation.



### Older Gypsy people living roadside

**Aunt RG** is a 77-year-old woman who lives alone but she travels with her two brothers and their families. Aunt RG has no legal place to stop and at the time of the interview, she had been living on the roadside on land that is used for an overspill car park for 3 months. Prior to this, the families had stopped near a town centre, but they were not able to stay that long before being evicted. Prior to that, they lived on the edge of a large refuse and recycling centre, but they also

got evicted from there. Christmas had been very hard and the families had to move five times between Christmas Eve and the second week in January.

**Aunt L** is a 62-year-old woman who has been married to Uncle J (see below) for 42 years and they have two caravans (they each tow one caravan when they need want to move). They have five married children (four daughters and a son) plus eight grandchildren. All of the family visit Aunt L and Uncle J regularly to check up on their needs. Aunt L and Uncle J usually travel with their relatives and friends as it is much safer when they are a larger group and local communities don't always take to Gypsies 'on their patch'. At the time of interview they were living roadside and had been there for four weeks — parked behind a disused factory in Doncaster after being 'moved on' [evicted] from Barnsley.

**Uncle J** is a 67-year-old man who is married to Aunt L (above) – They both remain well and are very mobile, they do not really need much help at all. Family life is very important to them, so close regular contact with family means everything to them.

**Uncle F** is a 72-year-old widower. His wife died over fifteen years ago when they were stopping on a site in Manchester. Now he mainly travels on his own to different places, but he likes to stop and visit his children or grandchildren and sometimes travels with his family. At the time of the interview he had been in the same location for three weeks. Uncle F was living on his son's plot for a few weeks during the summer — but his son was still waiting to see if planning permission was going to be granted. This situation could potentially be precarious for Uncle F — because if his son does not get planning permission, he would have nowhere to

move to due to a lack of trailer sites and temporary stopping places.

**Uncle BRG** is a 69-year-old man, who is disabled (he is hard of hearing and is blind). Uncle BR did not marry and travels with his brother. They both like to travel and live roadside. However, similar to most nomadic Gypsies, they are frequently evicted due to lack of authorised sites. Although at the time of interview, they had been located in one place for nine weeks, prior to this, they had been to see their other brother for a while. After being evicted yet again, Uncle BRG and his brother ended up living at the rubbish recycling centre with other Gypsy families. Uncle BRG keeps his trailer very tidy and his niece, nephew and brother will help when they stop nearby — but they are not always there and so sometimes Uncle BRG struggles with daily tasks.

### Older Gypsy people living in housing

**Aunt S** is a 68-year-old woman who has been married for 35 years — she used to live on a trailer site, but she was forced to move into housing following flooding. Aunt S also told us she that she had become concerned about being on the road and ageing (because of lack of facilities and the constant evictions). She has now been living in a cottage for six years and her husband and other family members live close by. She has five grown-up children (three boys and two girls) and they are all married and have children of their own. So, Aunt S and her husband are the proud grandparents of 12 grandchildren (who they clearly dote on)! They see their children, grandchildren and other family members quite regularly and are very involved in family life.

**Aunt DS** is a 65-year-old woman who has been living in housing for 18 years, and has been married to Uncle HS (see below) for more than 48 years. Together they have a very large family — and as Aunt DS stated, ‘they are always in and out of their home night and day!’ The couple had moved into a house in the late 1990s due to the lack of space to rear their large, growing family. They used to have two trailers but the caravans were not big enough

and as Uncle HS was the only driver it became increasingly impossible for them to travel. With this in mind, they decided to ‘settle’ down, at least until the family had grown up. They are now situated in a town where there are other Gypsy families in housing.

**Uncle HS** is aged 80 years old and he is married to Aunt DS (above). Due to having a very large family to home, bring-up and educate, both himself and his wife decided to move from the caravan site that they had resided on for many years and live in bricks and mortar. Although it is now many years since their family grew up (and they now have had families of their own) Uncle HS and Aunt DS remain in housing to this day.

**Aunt M** is a 90-year-old Gypsy woman who has been living in warden-supported housing for nearly 14 years. She moved into her present home not long after her husband died 12 years ago. Aunt M has travelled for all of her married life, but she also lived with her husband on a caravan site in Lincoln for many years. They have five children who have now all grown up and they have families of their own. She described herself as a granny, a great-granny and a great-great-granny. As part of a very large family, her children see that most of her needs are met, (for example they make sure she has a hot meal each evening, and they get her washing and shopping done etc.) However, she likes to do her own cleaning and to maintain her independence. Aunt M walks with the aid of a walking frame as she is not very mobile, and this limits the way she is able to live her life.

**Aunt K** is a 60-year-old Gypsy woman who has been a widow for five years. Aunt K and her husband used to live in a caravan when they first got married, but they moved into the cottage about 9 years after getting married. However, with few places to stop and the constant risk of eviction, they decided to move into a permanent place. Aunt K has now been living in housing for 21 years. Aunt K has one child — a daughter who is in her late twenties who lives at home. Aunt K enjoys living in a cottage and she works as volunteer at a local charity shop a few days every week.



## 6 Older people's experiences of life on the road

All of the Gypsies we interviewed for this study had lived a traditional nomadic life at some time in their lives. However, at the time we spoke to them, only five of the older people were still living on the road and five had moved into housing.

### The pleasure of a life on the road

Life on the road (nomadism) is frequently misunderstood. It is so much more than just travelling. Life on the road informs people's values, language, beliefs and practices and it is here that families find work, friendship, community and support.<sup>27</sup> All of older people we spoke to highlighted how important 'life on the road' was for Gypsy people and their identity. For example, Uncle J (who is still living on the road), explained what he valued about his culture:

The best thing about living where I am now or wherever I'm living, is that sense of freedom, I can get up in the morning say, if I wanted to and say right, I'm gonna move 50 mile away and I can go there, I can go, and I have no time limit... I find pleasure in roaming off, walking down the lane or over the fields or whatever, I find pleasure in that and sometimes I go the fairs which, what few fairs is left and 'er all in

all, I would say this, I do believe it's a good life but it's coming to an end. Our way of life is coming to an end — like I said, it's a great shame but there's not many who'll have the roadsides now. You know they want sites now or they'll buy their own piece of ground and... But that's taking us freedom from us, you know.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

**Aunt L** also described what she valued from life on the road: -

The best thing about living here, I like it 'cos I'm free, you're not under no pressure, no stress, I get up in the morning and do my own thing because you feel free.

*Aunt L, aged 62, living roadside*

**Uncle HS** has been living in housing for 18 years, but he still talked with pride about his life on the road, recalling his life and how he had both lived in trailers (caravans) and before that, in traditional bow-top wagons. He also described how he used to build bow-top wagons and his life as a young man. He described his experiences and some of the challenges that Gypsies face today:

Well I have friends my age who still live in caravans and they visit me and say they couldn't do it, couldn't



live in a house but it's harder to live in a caravan now than my mam and dad's generation. They make it too hard for us to live like we used to. It was better for my mam and dad 'cos they lived next to their families like they always did, they could still go out hawking elder flowers in the villages, it might have been harder work and less money but [it was] still better. We used to be able to stay on the road but, then a number of years ago they started to stop it, they could come and drag your caravan away, take your motor to a compound. Some people even had children took away. So, Gypsies started to save up and buy little pieces of land for their families to live on but they won't let you stay there either, so what I'd like them to do is let old Gypsies like myself who are born and raised in caravans stay in caravans in peace on their own land

*Uncle HS, aged 80, living in housing*

**Uncle HS** raised an important issue here: because there is a national shortage of suitable permanent and transit trailer sites,<sup>28</sup> Gypsies and Travellers often buy land and apply for planning permission to establish a legal site. However, research suggests that local communities frequently object to Traveller and Gypsy attempts to establish legal sites — despite the fact that local authorities have failed to provide the necessary statutory pitches.<sup>29</sup>

Many of the older people talked of the joy of travel with family but they also have the choice to travel alone or with friends. Unlike people in housing, this means that if older people want a change, then they are free to both change location and their travel companions. Uncle F offered a good example of how nomadic life can be adapted to meet the needs of older people within the nomadic extended family, he explained:

'I was on a bit of land near Accrington with my daughter and her husband, but they pulled down Great Yarmouth way for the summer, [for] the seaside with the grandchildren and that you know? But it's too far for me to go all that way so I'm having a few weeks with me nephew instead'

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

## Facing the winter

Gypsy mobility can be influenced by a number of factors such as the seasons of year, the needs of the family, employment opportunities, family events such as wedding and funerals, as well as social events such as horse fairs etc. Often nomadic Gypsies find a place to rest-up during the winter and while traditionally farmers would have allowed families to winter-over, the changes to planning laws means that this is no longer possible. Consequently, families find it hard to find a place to shelter during the winter. Uncle J talked about this:

You see the travelling people today are never isolated. They always have some friends or some relations who moves with 'em and then, when the real bad weather comes in the winter and that, we look for somewhere to get where we can be stable and the amenities is near to us and that so we can obviously get through the winter... The worst thing, the worst thing is and I know you'll say well obviously, is the weather, when it's cold and blowing and things like that. We are only in a trailer.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

**Aunt RG** also highlighted the urgency of finding a place to winter-over when she asked one of the community workers/Gypsy researchers:

'Ay, when do you think we'll have to be gone? Have you found us anywhere yet, we needs somewhere for the winter [sounded anxious]? ...We are desperate before the winter...'

*Aunt RG, aged 77, living roadside*

**Aunt L** also talked about some of her experiences of winter and how they combatted some of the challenges. She reflected:

I think what's the worst thing about living here is, sometimes the winter can be a bit miserable, dark nights and all that. We have a genny (a generator) outside and that's runs me 'lectric [electric] and charges my phone.

## Pressed to the margins of society

While nomadic life has many advantages, one of the most shocking findings from this





research was that some of the older people who were living roadside, described how they had been forced into living on rubbish/recycling dumps because there was nowhere else they could stop. For example, Uncle BRG who is blind and hard of hearing explained how he and his brother had been forced to live on a tip (a rubbish dump) as they had nowhere else to stop. Clearly living in these unsafe and unsanitary conditions is hazardous for older people, although Uncle BRG appeared to take his physical deprivation in his stride as he recalled:-

If you get the rain, the flood comes up right up to the trailer door! It's better than the tip [the rubbish dump] though (laughing)...

*Uncle BRG, aged 69, living roadside*

**Aunt RG** (aged 77 living roadside) also described how she and her family had been evicted off a different rubbish dump on Christmas Eve and she described how between Christmas and the second week in January, the authorities had evicted them five times. At the time of the interview, she was living on yet another car park. However, the experiences of these older people are not unique as other research also shows how Gypsies and Travellers are often forced into marginal spaces – such as beside motorways, rubbish tips, sewage farms and other spaces that are unsuitable for human habitation.<sup>30</sup> Successive governmental policies and planning laws have resulted in a lack of access to traditional stopping places and authorised trailer sites. This in turn creates a continuous cycle of unauthorised stopping and forced evictions. However, it is notable that other studies have also found that even where there are local authority sites, many of these offer abysmal living conditions<sup>31</sup> and Gypsies and Travellers often report that they are forced to live in conditions that would not be tolerated for any other ethnic populations in the UK.<sup>32, 33</sup> Moreover, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2017,20), noted that site conditions have “*strongly deteriorated following the legislative changes, with an increase in site overcrowding and roadside halts*”<sup>34, 35</sup> and the situation for Gypsies and Travellers has been further complicated not only by the lower rate of planning permission being granted.



## Facing constant eviction

As a result of the exclusionary policies of successive governments, many nomadic Gypsy and Traveller people (old and young) find that they are forced to stop on unauthorised land and consequently find that they are subject to constant eviction. All of the older people we interviewed who were living on the roadside expressed anxiety about the threat of constant evictions. **Aunt L** (living roadside) typified the experiences of most nomadic Gypsies,

*We've been here about 4 weeks; they [police/authorities] have not come yet [sounded anxious], so I don't know how much longer [we can stay]. We were at Barnsley [before], but they shifted us, so we come here'*

*Aunt L, aged 62, living roadside*

While this study did not specifically seek to examine the health impacts of evictions, all of the older people living on the road expressed anxiety about the constant threat of evictions. For example, **Uncle F** reflected:

*Well we haven't got permission to be here, my nephew is trying to get planning to stop here all the time, but you know how that is don't you? So, the worst thing is knowing no matter how nice you make it, they can still chuck you off and then you got to start all over again ain't ya?*

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

Other studies examining the impact of evictions on mental-health suggest that while the eviction process itself can cause stress, the constant fear of eviction also creates additional pressure<sup>36</sup> and the cumulative impact of successive evictions has an impact on the health of Gypsies and Travellers.<sup>37</sup>

## Older Gypsies living without access to running water

Safe drinking water is a human right and it is part of the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal six)<sup>38</sup> – the right to access to clean water has been recognised by the United Nations and is part of

binding international law.<sup>39</sup> However, most of the older people living on the road highlighted that they did not have easy access to clean water- although they had all developed strategies to cope. For example, Aunt L (aged 62) was very stoical in her replies, when asked about her access to amenities. She described how her family drove to the local garage to get drinking water and how they used the 'wash house' (i.e. the launderette) for washing clothes and the local leisure centre to have a shower. Uncle J also talked about the strategies he and his wife used to access water and amenities:

*Yes, there's a launderette in a little arcade of shops and 'er we go there once or twice a week and, also just up the road there's a leisure centre that lets us use the showers.*

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

**Aunt RG** (aged 77) told us that her family collected her drinking water and the community workers at the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group, also helped as they took Aunt RG for a bath every week and washed and dried her bedding when needed.

**Uncle F** told us that he currently had access to a tap and used other strategies to support himself, he explained: -

*It's all right my gel, good as anywhere I suppose, we got a tap [water] on here so that's cushty, (good/all fine). Saves me having to drive to the garage with my [water] cans every day and I got my little generator for the lights and if I want to watch a bit of telly on a night time. One of the gels will call round if they're going to the bendics [the launderette] and take me bit of washing for me, and I go up the swimming baths for a proper shower when I want one'*

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

**Uncle BRG** (who is aged 69 and disabled) described how his brother takes him out in the van to find a place to have a wash and he usually washes his clothes in a launderette but at the time of the interview, the van had broken down and he had three bags of clothing waiting for washing.



## 7 Why do some Gypsies move into housing?

It is not uncommon for families to stop travelling and move into housing whilst their children are in education although most families will invariably return to life on the road if they can.<sup>40</sup> Certainly all of the older people we interviewed either were nomadic or had been nomadic during their lifetime. So, we wanted to know why some of the older people had decided to move into housing.

**Aunt S** (aged 68) has been living in a cottage for six years now and her husband and other family members live close by. She described how poor-quality sites had finally pushed her off the road. She stated:

*I lived on our caravan site, but it got flooded very badly, we lost a lot of our sheds and [horses'] tackle and we couldn't go back afterwards. The younger ones stayed in trailers and moved somewhere else, but we thought it best to move into a house at our age.*

**Aunt S** told us the things she valued now she was living in housing:

*Ah, well, security I should say. It is kind of a contented feeling when you think 'I can stay here! You can settle and nobody will come and move us, you ain't got that pressure of have we got to find somewhere else 'cos the council won't let you stop, or you're on a good place but some people pulls on who your people don't get on with, that's definitely the best thing... Oh I think the facilities are much better of course, the actual building is good I've got every facility, but it still doesn't make up for losing my community.*

*Aunt S, aged 68, living in housing*

**Uncle HS** (age 80) explained that he had to move due to ageing and his wife's poor health:

*I can't potter up and down the way I used to, I used to get everywhere you know, but I'm eighty years*

*old, I do feel closed in, but the wife's been poorly you know? We have to be here.*

**Aunt M** has been living in warden supported housing for nearly 14 years. She is now aged 90 and she needs to use a walking aide, she seemed stoic in her response to moving into housing and also talked about how physical life could be on the road, she stated:

*How do I find it, do you mean do I like it? Got to do, got to like it whether I do or not!*

However, **Aunt M** also highlighted some of the things she enjoyed now she was living in a warden supported flat — she stated:

*The best thing? Oh! We have 'er entertainment, we have entertainment here, 'er we have dinners here as well and what else, oh 'er all the women here help one another, they helps one another, we all help one another.*

*Aunt M, aged 90, living in housing*

Significantly, **Aunt DS** who has been living in housing for 18 years, was clear that she did not have to be on the road in order to be a Gypsy, she stated:

*I'm still a Gypsy even though I live in a house! People say I'm not anymore, but I try to explain it's what I was born; I can't escape it — wherever I go*

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Aunt DS** makes an important point here because changes to planning legislation (Planning Policy for Traveller sites, 2015/2016) resulted in a new definition of who is to be regarded as a Gypsy-Traveller for planning purposes. This change means that Gypsies and Travellers will need to ensure that they can prove that they were travelling, actively







seeking work in order to retain Gypsy-Traveller status (i.e. if they want to apply for a permanent site). Indeed, an article in the Travellers Times sums up the situation — ‘*The definition is far from clear but after years of encouraging Travellers to settle and travel less, it now says you have to travel to be allowed to remain settled*’.<sup>41</sup>

All of the older people we interviewed who are now living in housing highlighted how they really valued the availability of amenities. For example, **Aunt DS** stated:

I like it. I have a washing machine, drier, dishwasher, showers, and central heating and hot and cold water, I've got everything whereas before, I didn't have anything! I used to wash my clothes outside in a dolly tub and hang them out — so in the winter it was very hard. Now its luxury actually!

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Uncle HS** also echoed her sentiments stating:

The best thing? Well like I said before, you've got your bathroom and central heating, but I still miss my caravan... It's not too bad [long pause]. How do I explain this to you? I feel the benefit in the winter with the central heating and all that; do you understand what I mean? But the caravan, it's easier to clean and a lot better than a house...

*Uncle HS, aged 80, living in housing*

**Aunt K** described what she liked about it, she recounted:

I don't know really, it's nice and private. I haven't got next-door neighbours or nothing. You can just do what you want and 'er, I don't know, I like it there really it's something different.

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in housing*

What is interesting from listening to **Aunt K** is that she identified that she likes the privacy and the quiet. It is easy to assume that all Gypsies will like the same thing (i.e. lots of family and community activity) but as with all older people, Gypsies are individuals and have their own interests, likes and dislikes.

Therefore, we need to be cautious and not assume that all older Gypsies will like or need the same things.

## Do you miss anything about life on the road?

We also wanted to know if there was anything that the older people missed from their life on the road, **Uncle HS** reflected:

You are like you're closed in here; do you know what I mean? Sometimes I get itchy feet and I just want to be out

*Uncle HS aged 80, living in housing*

**Aunt DS** described her strong feelings about life on the road and how she felt about living in housing. She stated:

The worst thing is when it gets warm weather, soon as it comes spring I want to get out, I dream about green fields and being free, because I do feel boxed in — in the winter time. Summertime we're outside all the time we only come in to sleep.

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Aunt S** also described how she missed the sociability and companionship that she found in nomadic Gypsy life.

I like it but I miss the sense of community, although I've got family around me I miss having other Gypsy people around me, people of my own age who I would go out and have a chat to, I miss that... I was hardly ever in the trailer, I was always having a wander around the site for a cup of tea with my pals or just outside cleaning round or hanging washing you know? If it was nice a few of the women would walk down the shops or take the kids to the park, it ain't like that here...

*Aunt S, aged 68, living in housing*

Listening to the older people living in housing, it seems that they really valued the amenities and the security that life in a building could offer. However, what was significant was that they missed their traditional lives that offered them a sense of freedom, the open road and community.

## 8 The importance of family in Gypsy life

All of the older people we interviewed highlighted the importance of family in their lives. Many of the older people (in trailers and in housing) still live nearby or with their extended family<sup>42</sup> and close family life is important for most Gypsies.<sup>43</sup>

In this study, all of the older people (both on the road and living in housing), highlighted how they valued the support offered from their extended family. For, example, **Aunt DS** reflected:

My friends, my son lives across the road, my daughter is three doors down, in fact all my children live nearby, all 11 of them (laughs) so that's the 65 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren- all popping in and out all the time (laughs)'

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Uncle F** also reflected on the companionship and support of family life in old age on the road:

'Yeah, I walk out and have a chat and a cup of tea with the boys on a morning 'fore they goes out hawking, My gel or one of my granddaughters whoever I'm stopping with usually comes in and has a clean up for me and fetches me dinner and the children is always running in and out I have to chase them half the time! (Laughs)

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

Consequently, most of the older people stated that they did not feel lonely. However, **Aunt RG** reflected that she did get lonely sometimes, but her life was better when her brothers and other family pull up near-by, she stated:

No, I gets a bit lonely I do, [ she smiles], it's alright now because P and M call in, they pulled in the other day but when there is just me and X (name of brother), I sometimes gets a bit lonely, they too busy looking after the boy. But I likes it- P boys coming in, look her boy has cleant [cleaned] and polished for me

today...Trouble is, if the camp gets bigger, you might get shifted (evicted) again

*Aunt RG, aged 77, living roadside*

**Aunt RG** also raised an important point when she highlighted how planning laws restrain family contact because if any more members of her family moved to be nearer to her, then everyone would risk getting evicted.

**Uncle F**, aged 72 also talked about how he likes to spend time alone and with others he reflected:

I have a ride about in my lorry sometimes, go for a visit if there's people I know stopping near, or just to have a bit of dinner and get my bit of shopping you know? I takes my little dogs for a walk everyday, not far just up and down the lanes wherever we stopping at, I don't sit in the trailer much if I can help it. Sometimes the children take me out to a boot sale or something.

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

In listening to the older Gypsy people, it seemed that they all had family or friends around or nearby to give support. However, in spite of this, a few of the older people suggested that they still got lonely sometimes. Although loneliness can to happen to anyone, research suggests that it is more common among older people and this can be due to age related processes (such as retirement, the death of a partner, disability etc.) and these factors often have a considerable impact on people in their old age.<sup>44</sup> As **Uncle BRG** reflected:

I don't get much company, sometimes I go with J for a ride out and the company, but I would like more company, ay yes more company (sounded wistful).

*Uncle BRG, aged 69, living roadside*



Although **Uncle BRG** travels with his brother, he has hearing and visual disabilities and it is possible that this amplifies his isolation, as he has to depend on his family for his mobility needs.<sup>45</sup>

However, it was notable that **Aunt K** stated that she wasn't lonely, not only because she had support from her daughter but also but because she was engaged in the local community, she explained:

Yes, I do get a lot of company, I get to see and talk to people every day. I work as a volunteer in a charity shop so I'm never lonely.

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in housing*

Listening to the older people it was clear that their extended family did play an important role in their lives, although some of the older people did feel lonely sometimes. Interestingly,

in 2018, the government produced 'A strategy for tackling loneliness' and the strategy states

People need access to places where they can get together. They need transport that enables them to get to places where they can connect with others. Thoughtful planning and housing can also make a difference, making it natural and easy for people to see each other, chat in passing or spend time together, building friendships over time.

*Her Majesty's Government (2018, 36)<sup>46</sup>*

Ironically, that is just what the older Gypsy people in this study were asking for — i.e. for the authorities to build more trailer sites and stopping places, so that they could also 'chat in passing or spend time together, building friendships over time'...



## 9 The shadow of discrimination

We did not plan to ask the older people about their experiences of discrimination, but it was notable that the shadow of discrimination was threaded throughout the older people's narratives. Anti-Gypsyism has been rising on the political agenda.<sup>47, 48, 49</sup> Although legally they should be protected from racism<sup>50</sup> "several reports have suggested that racism against Gypsies can be seen as the 'last acceptable form of racism'".<sup>51, 52</sup>

Listening to the older people, it seemed that it was those living on the road who experienced the most blatant discrimination. **Uncle F** explained

I'm safe enough with my own people round me, I worry bout the gorgers [non- Gypsy people], big half growned men coming and throwing stones at the trailers in the night, or the muskras [the police] coming at the crack of dawn when you're still in your bed — but that's something you have to get used to when you're on the side of the road. Maybe if he gets this place passed [i.e. if his nephew gets planning permission] I can stay here, and it won't have to worry about that then

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

Certainly, many of the older Gypsies would have experienced a lifetime of dealing with discrimination and some of the older people described the avoidance techniques they used to keep away from racist attacks or abuse. **Uncle J** described how the threat of abuse and racial attacks were part of the backdrop to his life. He described that even when there are authorised stopping places, often these are often not safe. He explained:

Yes, we have got a little terrier [dog], but the safety aspect of it is that we're travelling with our relations, our friends and we like, stick together sort of thing. If there is any noise or 'ote outside, the men's up,

looking what it is or what it isn't like. But that's why now the campsites as we call them, we call them stopping places. But the campsites now we got to pick 'em, where we think it' and we will be left alone. Like I said earlier on we don't like to be near big housing developments and things like that, 'cos you'll get, what can I say, the idiots I call them, but I suppose you'd call them summat else, come back shouting, especially if it's on a pub route, they'll come back shouting and etc., maybe throwing bottles or something like that, so now, we are limited to where we can go, we got to feel safe in our own selves. So apart from that, no in all fairness, in my opinion remember, in my opinion we have a good life.

*Uncle J, aged 76, living roadside*

For **Uncle J** and his family, hiding away from the gaze of authorities and the settled community seemed to be a purposeful strategy to ensure they did not meet conflict/discrimination/eviction and he talked about the changes he had seen over the years:

Well I do believe that there has been a hell of a lot of progress from, let me just see, from the 70s, the middle 70s, 80s I think there has been a lot of, a lot of progress done from then, 'cos then we classed as how can I say...? Is it 'ethnic' or whatever they want to call it and they put signs in pubs [saying] 'No Travellers Allowed'. Some shops wouldn't serve you and all through ignorance, all through ignorance. Well now we have people like yourselves, Liaison officers etc. [he is talking to the researcher from the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison group] and that who gets that message across to the gorgers [non- Gypsies]. As I say like and now the gorgers seem to mingle in with Gypsies, you know its, but years ago it was, "Oh the Gypsies is here, they'll steal the children", "they'll take the dogs", "they'll kill the chickens" you know — which was only ignorance.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*



**Aunt L** (living roadside) also talked about how they tried to stay away from areas where they might meet discrimination,

*Well we try to get not too near towns and council estates — ‘cos they can be a bit ‘rowdy’ sometimes.*

The community researcher observed in her notes that she was aware that **Aunt L** and her family had all experienced racial abuse and stone-throwing at different times.

In contrast, all of the older Gypsies we interviewed who were living in housing stated that they did feel safe in their homes. For example, **Aunt DS** who is now living in housing stated:

*I feel safer here than I would on my own in a caravan on a field or a site now I’m older. I’ve got my phone here as well and it’s very handy if I need the doctor or*

*anything, ‘cos I work them mobiles.*

It was interesting to note that all of the older people had access to a mobile phone and clearly this was valuable for staying in touch with loved ones as well as asking for help if needed.

**Aunt K** also suggested that she felt safe and content with her life in a cottage but she argued for nomadic Gypsies to be given the same rights as others. She stated:

*‘Well I like them to be tret normal, like everybody else gets tret normal. You know if they live in a trailer, or caravan as other people call ‘em. They should have a right to live there and settle there. Nobody telling them to get off the land or any think, let them settle down... Gypsies and Travellers should have sites so they can settle down for life...’*

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in housing*





Similar to other older people, **Aunt M** (90 years) talked about feeling unsteady on her feet and of not being able to go out without her walking aid. However, there were features of her home that made her feel safer, she stated:

Safe, yeah, my doors always locked, always lock me door, got a spy hole through me door to spy through (Laughs) yeah, I do feel safe here...(Laughs)

Her reflections and also comments from the other older people living in housing, seemed to be in stark contrast with the older people who are living on the road — as they have to carefully choose where to stop for fear of racial attack.

Other research also suggests that many older Gypsies and Travellers will have faced a lifetime of racial discrimination and in the UK there have been some horrific incidents of racism, such as arson and gang attacks against Gypsies and Travellers.<sup>53</sup> It is also important to note that some elements of the UK media can act as a catalyst for intolerance and discrimination and they have had a significant impact on the public perceptions of Gypsy and Traveller communities<sup>54</sup> and while the UK government has adopted policy measures to eliminate hate speech, a clearer strategy is needed to take action against the media and individuals that incite discrimination and racism against Gypsy communities and individuals. Clearly Gypsies and Travellers should be protected under the Equality Act (2010). Gate Herts have been running a campaign to encourage Gypsies and Traveller to report hate crime, Gate Herts will then assist as a third party.<sup>55</sup> The Traveller Movement have also been running a campaign to encourage Gypsies and Traveller to report this type of crime to the police.<sup>56</sup> Yet a large number of reports have highlighted how Gypsies and Travellers frequently experience discrimination, harassment and hate crime from the general public, as well as abuse and discrimination from the media and public authorities and public sector workers, including the police<sup>57, 58</sup> and a recent survey of Gypsy Traveller and Roma people found that 91% of

the people they interviewed had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity and 77% had experienced hate speech or a hate crime.<sup>59</sup>

However, by listening to the negative experiences of the older nomadic Gypsies (e.g. lack of amenities, security and constant evictions), it is clear that they also face structural inequalities that deny the older nomadic Gypsies their basic human rights. Moreover, government policy on Gypsies seems to ignore Gypsies as older people with age related needs — as nomadic Gypsies are usually homogenised and defined by their cultural relationship with the land (nomadism) and are often not seen as older citizens with specific needs.

However, despite experiencing discrimination, our study suggests that many of the Gypsy older people do enjoy mixing with the wider community (*gaje*), although the media often gives the impression that Gypsy and *gaje* people do not get on together.<sup>60</sup> However, in reality Gypsy and Traveller families have lived and worked alongside the *gaje* community for hundreds of years.<sup>61</sup>

**Uncle HS** reflected on the concerns of the local community when he first settled into housing:

'Well when I first came to live here, in this area, the people were like I 'oh he's a Gypsy man, don't talk to him', you could tell — do you know what I mean? But now I've been here that long they got used to me and asked me my name and they'll say, 'hello are you all right' and that you know?'

*Uncle HS, aged 80, living in housing*

So, although **Uncle HS** seemed pleased that he was finally accepted over time, his experience also highlights how prejudices are often held against ethnic Gypsies.

**Aunt DS** also told us about how she enjoyed the company of non-Gypsy friends as well as her family, she explained:

"Yes, every day the house is full. Every day. The *gaje* people [non- Gypsy] come in, if I'm out in the garden and they see me they'll come in for a chat.



## 10 Accessing support for health needs

A number of reports have highlighted that poor living conditions and environmental factors are the most influential contributing factors to the poor health status of Gypsies and Travellers<sup>62</sup> and significant health inequalities exist between the Gypsies/Travellers and the general population.<sup>63</sup> This research and other studies have highlighted that Gypsies and Travellers often face a range of challenges in trying to access health care services.<sup>64</sup> Nomadic Gypsies can often find it difficult to access a general practitioner (GP) due to the lack of a permanent address needed in order to register as a patient and the lack of GP registration may put older people at risk of being excluded from routine health screening. For example, Uncle J was pleased to be able to use the NHS walk-in centres, he stated:

Yes, yes, you see everywhere you go there's walk-in centres and things like that, as far as the health aspect and getting health care, we have no problem whatsoever, no problem with that.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

However, while this gives **Uncle J** access to acute healthcare, clearly this has implications for continuity of care, as well as limiting opportunities for taking part in health screening programmes. Uncle BRG (who is living with a disability) also explained how he accessed health care. He described how he used a combination of family support and support from the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group to access health services and he described how his brother would take him into a town to see a GP if he needed one and he stated:

All me letters goes to the office down there [i.e. the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group] for me address, Bethy reads them and rings through to R [his brother] if I've a' pointment. They take me to the 'ospital

*Uncle BRG, aged 69, living roadside*

Uncle F described how he drove back to an area where he trusted and knew the doctor. He explained:

I got a doctor back up in xxxxx who I see if I'm up there, and I drive back for important appointments but if I'm away I just have to find a walk-in centre or something. If I was really bad I 'spose one of them would take me to whatever hospital, we was closest too. Thank the blessed Lord I don't suffer with my health much, just a few aches in my bones sometimes but that's just the age of me (laughs)

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

**Aunt RG** also explained that she drove back to visit a GP she trusted (i.e. seeing a doctor working in another area). Additionally, she had support from family and friends, and she used the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group (DGLG) to help her by both acting as a postal address and accompanying her to health appointments when her family had other caring responsibilities.

**Uncle HS** now lives in housing and he compared this with his experiences of accessing services when living on the road, he stated:

Yeah, we have no problem with the doctor here. Years ago, they would say have you got a doctor, but you couldn't get one 'cos you didn't stay

anywhere long enough. But now my wife just phones and the doctor will come around, they even bring my tablets to me and everything I need...

*Uncle HS, aged 80, living in housing*

Yet accessing services also requires skills and a number of reports have highlighted that Gypsies and Travellers often lack literacy skills.<sup>65, 66</sup> Research suggests that low levels of literacy are often associated with adverse health outcomes<sup>67</sup> and clearly literacy is important for accessing health care services and health promotion. However, the last national census for England and Wales (2011), highlighted that 84% of Gypsies or Irish Travellers age 65 years and over, had no qualifications.<sup>68</sup>

Although **Aunt DS** (who has on-going health issues) explained how a small change in her local GP surgery had helped her to overcome her lack of literacy skills and supported her in attending appointments, she stated:

My doctor rings me a couple of days before my appointment to remind because they know I can't read my letters...

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Aunt L** also explained the informal strategy that she uses to receive hospital letters, she stated:

I get me letters sent to a friend; she's in a house. If any come, she just rings me and then I pick 'em up.

*Aunt L, aged 62, living roadside*





Another issue of concern is that many GP surgeries are now requiring patients to book appointments online and health and social care services are increasingly using digital solutions to provide health education. **Aunt S** gave an example of some of the challenges that the older people may face in modern surgeries, she suggested:

I think it would be nice to have someone to help you one to one at the doctors and places 'cos they do a lot of things online they call it and I don't understand it. They want emails and things and its ladging [i.e. embarrassing] when you don't know how to do it. Even if I had it, I wouldn't be able to write it I can't spell! (Laughs)

*Aunt S, aged 68, living in housing*

A recent report on the digital exclusion of Gypsies and Travellers found that there was a general lack of literacy among people age 40 and above. The report also found that Gypsies and Travellers were less likely to possess digital skills and significantly less likely to have a household internet connection than the majority of the population<sup>69</sup>. However, digital exclusion is not unique to Gypsies, as many other older people lack the skills and access to use on-line health services information and services.<sup>70</sup>

**Uncle J** explained:

Not all older people wish to use computers:

We are only in a trailer. We are only limited to what we can do in a trailer, at the end of the day. We can't go into a bedroom and switch off and things like that, like in a house or look at these computers, which I can't work 'em — which you'll find a lot of the old Travellers, they are not interested in that anyhow.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

Most of the older Gypsies (living in housing and on the road) highlighted the distance they needed to travel to access health care services. This issue is not unique to Gypsies and Travellers and a recent report by Public Health England highlighted that people in rural areas usually need to travel longer distances than their urban counterparts to access health care services and many older people do not have easy access to transport.<sup>71</sup>

As **Aunt K** explained:

I've got a doctor. I get to them by car it's only 2 mile up the road

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in housing*

The older people who took part in our study all found ways to access health care services, although it was the people living in housing that had the easiest access. However, our study has also identified that the older nomadic peoples experience social and economic conditions that can lead to avoidable health inequity and poor health outcomes.



## 11 What changes would older Gypsy people like to see?

We wanted to find out from the older people what changes would they like to see in order to improve the lives of other older Gypsies.

**Uncle BRG** (who is disabled) stated:

Make sure that there is places for disabled and older people with the family —they forget about us, not big places just for family, small places.

*Uncle BRG, aged 69, living roadside*

**Uncle F** reflected:

Let families make their own little sites and then they can look after their own old folk like they've always done. They don't need nursing homes and hospital nurses coming out. They just need somewhere safe to stop

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

**Aunt DS** talked about the needs of young and old people:

For older Gypsy people? Well, for young and old, 'cos the young are going to get old, if they feather their nests [i.e. earn some money and save up] while they're young and buy their own places to live on. The councils should give them planning permission to be able to stay, then they won't be a burden when they're older and have to have places found for them 'cos there is never any room on the sites. They could have chalets and toilets and be comfortable in their old age and look after themselves

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

**Aunt K** stated:

Well I like them to be tret normal, like everybody else gets tret normal. You know if they live in a trailer or caravan as other people call 'em. They should have a right to live there and settle there. Nobody telling them to get off the land or any think — let them settle down.

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in housing*

**Aunt L** told us:

Well, the healthcare is the most important thing with them being older and that. And er, I find that we get more help with the healthcare now than we did years ago, so the old 'uns gets took more care of and that.

*Aunt L, aged 62, living roadside*

**Aunt M** exclaimed:

Well lay the red carpet down (Laughs again) 'Erm what could be done? Yeah, it'd be the council wouldn't it? Well er, I think they should find sites. Sites so they could live comfortably

*Aunt M, aged 90 and, living in housing*



## 12 What do you enjoy doing the most in life?

The youngest Gypsy researchers who conducted some of the interviews for this study, suggested that we might want to ask the older people what they do for fun and what they enjoyed most in life! When we asked the older people, many of them highlighted events and experiences that they enjoyed with family and non-Gypsy people.

**Uncle BRG** aged 69 and living roadside stated that he liked '**Smokes and me lorry** (laughs)' — (even though Uncle is unable to drive now he still enjoys riding in his brothers lorry)

**Aunt L** aged 62 and living roadside exclaimed: **Bingo, I goes to the bingo... I drive there. It isn't far** — (the researcher pointed out that this was a 40-mile round trip)

**Uncle F** aged 72 living roadside talked about the way he liked to spend his day:

**Getting out and about, I like to drive me self on a run to see people, you know friends and family and looking after me animals.**

When we asked 60-year-old **Aunt K** who is living in housing what she enjoyed in life, she laughed replied:

**I don't know, have a laugh, go for a drink, have a dance 'er watch a nice picture on the TV or the cinema. An action picture, I like doing that.** (Laughs)

65 year old **Aunt DS** lives with her husband in housing and they clearly have a busy family life, she reflected:

**I like to look after my grand children that's fun for me, although to have them all I'd need a bigger house (laughs) I like to sew and I like to cook too.**

**Aunt S** aged 68 and living in housing also enjoyed her family and traditional life:

**I enjoy my grandchildren. I enjoy going on holidays with my daughters. And I really like it in the summer when I can go away to the Gypsy horse fairs for a few days at a time and get back amongst my own people, those sort of things.**

**Uncle HS** who is now aged 80 and living in housing also liked more traditional pursuits, he replied:

**That's a funny question to ask me. I used to enjoy going out hawking, I loved it, but I'm too old now, so I sit in this house, bored, looking out the window at the garden (sounded wistful)... I still make some wooden elder flowers but just for fun, to keep my hand in, not to sell... I have a special handmade knife for the job that is donkey's years old I have my old peg knife too but last time I made some pegs for my wife someone chored [stole] them off the line!** [Laughs...]



## 13 What is your favourite old object?



though I'll probably never use them. I still imagine I might go away one day

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*

Uncle F reflected on the things he enjoyed, he stated:

Like I said I like my little dogs, I like to mess about with my birds, and I don't mind going down the pub of an evening if the boys is going (laughs).

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*

We wanted to know if the older people had any favourite things that they valued from the past, not everyone could think of a special object but two of older people living roadside stated that they really valued their old cooking pots.

I still got me pan but can't use it now it's all wrapped up under that bunk — I like that old stick fire... I like to sit by a good fire

*Uncle BRG, aged 69, living roadside*

My old cast pots and frying pans, I've kept them all. I still have a fire and cook outside, once in a while. I still have my water jacks as well even







The favourite thing I've got is that blessed cross in the cabinet. Do you want to see it? This cross is over fifty years old. I love it. A priest even came and blessed it for me once. I never really get it out, but I did lend it to my sister for a while when she was poorly. I like my old peg knives but if you're asking, I love this best out the lot.

*Uncle HS, aged 80, living in housing*

**Aunt M** aged 90 and living in housing kindly showed us her china carthorse. Horses have always played an important role in Gypsy culture — having traditionally pulled family waggons.

**Aunt RG** age 77 and living roadside, told us that her favourite old thing and her favourite new thing was her budgerigar (called budgie) and before the interview ended the researcher asked if Aunt RG had any questions... Aunt RG replied'

I'm alright can you clean budgie out for me before you go?' (Grinning)







Aunt M aged 90 is living in a warden supported flat and she reminded us that it is important to keep active. She identified the modern thing she liked most:

Oh, I know, my shopping walker thing...  
(Laughs again) ... My son bought me some of my favourite scent. I like my ornaments too...

Well, the only thing I could add is this catapult, not particularly that one but some like was our main source of walking across the fields, rabbits and pigeons and that and the odd



pheasant, which we kept to ourselves  
(Laughter) every travelling man, well Gypsy man who went to walk anywhere had a catapult in their pocket, guaranteed, they always had a catapult in their pocket.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

(Note from Gypsy researcher — in the past catapulting was a necessity for food and some families used snares and nets)

Aunt S, aged 62, living roadside replied wistfully:

Memories, memories and how I used to live when I was little, looking back to my past





## 14 What is your favourite new object?

We wanted to know if the older people had a favourite new object — a few of the Aunts and Uncles thought it was a silly question!

For example, **Uncle HS** (aged 80 and living in housing) said:

What a daft question! Everything is modern to me (Laughs) I don't like any of it (laughs again) ... I suppose I don't mind a bit of telly.

However, some of the other Aunts and Uncles were happy to share the objects they enjoyed, for example: -

Ooh I have an air fryer, and I love my electric pressure cooker I can cook anything in it I just plug it in!

*Aunt DS, aged 65, living in housing*



What would be my new thing? Ah my vape pipe, I've packed cigarettes in and I've gone on my vape pipe and I think that's my favourite thing 'cos my granny and my aunt and all them they smoked a clay pipe and I suppose that's where I get it from, but I find a lot of pleasure in it, that's my favourite thing. My clay pipe substitute.

*Uncle J, aged 67, living roadside*

**Aunt S** aged 62 and living roadside said the modern thing she liked best was her 'pipe'





Smoking is very much a pastime and pleasure for many Gypsy people both men and women and is more prevalent in the Gypsy community than *gaje* community (Parry, 2007) — one research study has suggested that Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities have the highest rate of smoking of any ethnic group (Aspinall and Mitton, 2014). Certainly in the 18th and early 19th Century Gypsies would hawk and smoke pipes (Mayall, 1981) and the fashion of older women smoking pipes was still visible in the 1960s.<sup>72</sup> Nowadays there is far more awareness of the risks of smoking, especially in confined spaces (e.g. in a caravan with children), so often if someone has a smoke, they sit by a window and hang their arm out holding the cigarette or stand in the doorway. Many Gypsy and Traveller non-governmental organisations have run schemes on the effects of smoking offering assistance to those wanting to stop (Leeds Gate, 2015)

*I like my phone. It does allsorts. The kids send me videos and photos on it, and I can top it up with Internet at the shops. I wouldn't be without it now*

*Uncle F, aged 72, living roadside*



(All of the older people in the study had a mobile phone or access to a phone)

*My Minton (table ware) that's my favourite, I love my Minton.*

*Aunt K, aged 60, living in a house*

Note from Gypsy researcher: Although this is new china, this is a traditional pattern loved by many Gypsy families





## 15 Summary of the findings

This is the first study to have been conducted that identified any differences between the lives and experiences of older Gypsies living on the roadside and those living in housing.

Despite the limitations of the study, we hope that this report will help to increase the understanding of the lives of older Gypsies and make service providers more aware of the differing health and social care needs of older Gypsy people.



### So, what did we learn from the older Gypsies?

1. **Nomadic life is culturally important, and it can offer older people many advantages.**

All of the nomadic older Gypsies highlighted the value and pleasures of a life on the road. We heard them speak with passion about the value of their traditional way of life; the freedom and open space, their culture, family and community life. Our research has also highlighted how having a nomadic life can offer older people flexibility to stay with family and friends in a way that suits the older people. It also offers the families the opportunity shares any responsibilities for care across the family.

2. **Due to a lack of trailer sites and stopping places, older nomadic Gypsies and their families are often pushed into living on marginal and dangerous spaces:**

Gypsies have a right to be nomadic but successive governmental policies have resulted in a chronic national shortage of sites and stopping places for Gypsies (and Travellers). This often makes Gypsies (and Travellers) go onto unauthorised encampments and our research highlighted how older people and their families are often forced into living in unsafe places, such as rubbish dumps and car parks —

with no access to clean water. This not only denies older people their human rights but also potentially risks their health and dignity in old age. Surely this situation must raise questions about how we treat our older citizens in the 21st century. Are we really willing to let older people live on rubbish dumps, especially as at the time of writing this report, the UK had the 6th largest economy in the world.<sup>73</sup>

### **3. Living in fixed accommodation has benefits for many older Gypsy people.**

The older Gypsy people we interviewed had either moved into housing due to poor quality facilities when living in the road and/or they move into housing due to health issues and/or ageing. However, they really valued the amenities (such as running water and heating) and the security that living in a building could offer. Most of the older people highlighted that they also had family and friends nearby but that they also missed their traditional, cultural life on the road — that had offered them freedom, friendship and community.

### **4. Families are important to most Gypsies and the older people benefited from their support.**

All of the older people we interviewed highlighted the importance of family and the value of the help and support they received from their family. However, in spite of this, a few of the older people did suggest that they still got lonely sometimes.

### **5. Many older Gypsies live in the shadow of discrimination.**

We did not plan to ask the older people about their experiences of discrimination,

but it was notable that the shadow of discrimination was threaded throughout their narratives. Listening to the older people, it seemed that it was those living on the roadside that are experiencing the most blatant discrimination and they described some of the avoidance techniques they use to keep away from racist attacks and/ or racial abuse.

### **6. Access to health services.**

All of the people in housing were registered with a doctor and therefore they have the same access to services as the wider community (as well as the disadvantages such as people living in rural areas having to drive long distances to access surgeries). However, while the nomadic older people did manage to access health services this was mainly through local NHS walk in services — the concern about this is that it precludes them from health screening and does not promote continuity of care. Our study also found that most of the older people who took part in the study were not literate (and they needed to use family or friends to read information /letters). For the nomadic older people who do not have a permanent address — most of them had arranged for hospital letters to be delivered to the address of family member, friend or the Gypsy support group.

A few of the older people expressed concern about the use of modern technology in health settings (as they could not read and did not know how to use a computer). This has implications for health care providers as people who are not literate may become exclude from accessing health services.







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## Chapter 10

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## Chapter 14

72. One of the Gypsy researchers on this project reflected: — 'No one knew of the consequences of smoking or secondary smoking, indeed as a child I was sat upon a knee and encouraged to take a puff of so-called pipe or cigarette (tuvali). In the past many people (gaje and Romany Gypsies alike) were not aware of the dangers of smoking and it might be suggested that the Gypsy community are often later in adapting to new health promotion knowledge.

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We've had a good life and we  
have enjoyed every minute of  
it and we wouldn't do  
nothing different... and  
that's true'

*Aunt L  
aged 62  
living roadside*

**MOVING FORWARD**



**DERBYSHIRE  
GYPSY LIAISON  
GROUP**

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